

A Success On Her First Try

By JAN PADFIELD

Deseret News Staff Writer

Salt Laker Rodello Hunter has done what thousands of writers dream about but rarely do. She's written a widely acclaimed and fast-selling book on her first try.

In fact, Mrs. Hunter and her book "A House of Many Rooms," achieved success in almost storybook fashion.

REJECTED AT first by a

Western publisher who said her work lacked appeal, Mrs. Hunter casually sent it on to New York editor she was acquainted with.

The New York publisher grabbed it up immediately without revision, asking only that the title be changed from "Come Over Here, My Son."

From then on, everything started coming up roses for Mrs. Hunter and her story about a Mormon family in Heber City at the turn of the century.

PUBLISHER ALFRED A.

Knopf, whose firm spends much time turning down unsolicited manuscripts, explained that Mrs. Hunter's effort was the one in a 1,000 accepted from an unknown "over the transom."

The book is already in its second printing, and just last month appeared as top choice in the latest edition of Reader's Digest Condensed Books. It also was declared a recent Reader's Digest bonus book.

Publisher Knopf has sold the British and French rights and is negotiating movie rights. It is also being published at the same time in Canada by Random House.

HE'S ENTHUSIASTIC about the whole thing, predicts it will make Mrs. Hunter famous. A first step is a \$10,000 full page ad in the New York Times.

"It has the universality and appeal of Clarence Day's 'Life With Father,'" Mr. Knopf believes.

The reviews—more than 200 to date and still coming in to the Hunter household—have given the book high acclaim.

Monica Dickens of the Boston Sunday Globe considered it the "best family story that I can ever remember."

DAVID APPEL of the Philadelphia Inquirer termed it "A Mormon tale full of nostalgic charm... filled with family anecdote and poignant vignettes of rural, turn-of-the-century America."

The Omaha World-Herald, declaring Mormon books "everlastingly readable, said the book is a 'Currier & Ives



Papa, principal character of "House of Many Rooms," Mrs. Hunter and grandson and the house in Heber.

print come to life and it reflects... a far more innocent America... and a far better one than we have today."

Already the book's peppery bits of wisdom are being quoted by newspaper advice columnists? "Sincerity is a precious thing—not easily found or kept." "A man who is known to tell the truth will be believed under impossible circumstances;" "Goodbye is a little death, death is a big good bye;" "Growing up seems to take such a long time, yet growing old takes such a short while;" "It takes a man to really brighten up a woman's day, be she six, sixteen or sixty."

MRS. HUNTER'S novel really isn't fiction. It's actually her family experiences in Heber City from 1886 to 1936 as a girl adopted and reared by her grandparents.

It's a story of Papa and Mama—grandmother and grandfather—their 10 "owned" and five "borrowed" children and the people of Heber Valley.

Mrs. Hunter, one of the "borrowed," slept next to the family kitchen where the family spent most of its time. "I didn't listen to private conversation; I was just there and heard."

SHE WROTE the 22-chapter book in 22 afternoons and evenings. Whenever she got an afternoon off from work she would write one full chapter.

Naturally it wasn't all from her own memory.

"I wrote to the family who polished up their memories and brought them to me, gleaming like Papa's Jonathan apples in bushel baskets."

Papa lived with her the last five years he was alive and provided much of her material.

"While I was doing housework," Mrs. Hunter recalls, "he would sit and tell me over and over of the old days."

PAPA, "a powerful man with real integrity" who lived to age 92, is the dominant character.

Mrs. Hunter remembers: "He loved his family... he loved people. He never had money, wagons or tools. He had either given them away or loaned them. Papa taught me that love is the most powerful force in the world."

"One day a friend came to the farm to buy several little pigs, Papa said they were \$2 each, but the young man insisted the price was \$8. But

Papa was adamant: 'No wear—er pig is worth more than \$2!'"

ADDING GREATLY to the charm of the book are the drawings by Roy Olsen, also of Salt Lake City.

Another interesting facet are the ballads sung by the family, many handed down from their ancestors: "Come Home Early Tonight My Dear Boy," "White Felither O Lay," "Come Over Here, My Son," (both words and music written by Papa Dave), and a little girl's plea to a store clerk, "I Want to Buy a Little Bit of Love."

Words and music to these songs, recalled by the author, have been set down by her friend, Mrs. Emma Tadjae. Plans are to have them recorded.

THE INTRIGUING titles on page headings are Mrs. Hunter's own: "Forever Is a Rag Carpet"... "The Day of the Dog"... "To Gooseberry Heaven"... "Something of Word Piles"... "Living Equals Dying"... "Laugh at Sensible Things"... "The Death of the Wedding China"... "Let Auld Acquaintance Be Forgotten"... "The Door Closes."

Mrs. Hunter is an enigma to the press. Even her publisher knows little about her except she went to the University of Utah and has three daughters: Bobbi, a senior at Skyline High School; Ann, an English teacher at Bonneville Junior High, and Salley, mother of a five-year-old boy and secretary at a local insurance agency.

Her first real attempt at writing was in the 9th grade at Wasatch Junior High.

"By the time I was a senior I was selling little things and getting paid by the inch," Mrs. Hunter recounts. "Then nothing except some road shows until 1957 when I had a poem published."

In 1957 she went to work for the Utah Fish and Game Magazine writing feature articles and stories for children.

NOW BEGINNING a year's leave from her work as associate editor of the Utah Fish and Game Magazine, Mrs. Hunter will answer her fan mail and work on her next book, "Climb a Glass Hill."

"It is a novel... all fiction. I'd never write another memoir. I spent more time getting releases from individuals than writing the book," she laughed.

On the basis of public response, sales, an enthusiastic publisher, and the author's ability, it appears the first successful book may not be the last.

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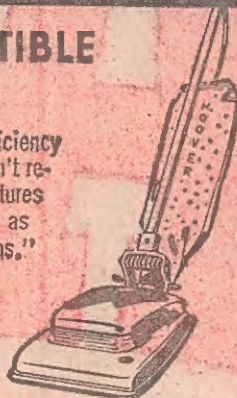
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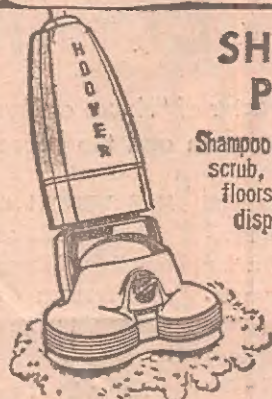
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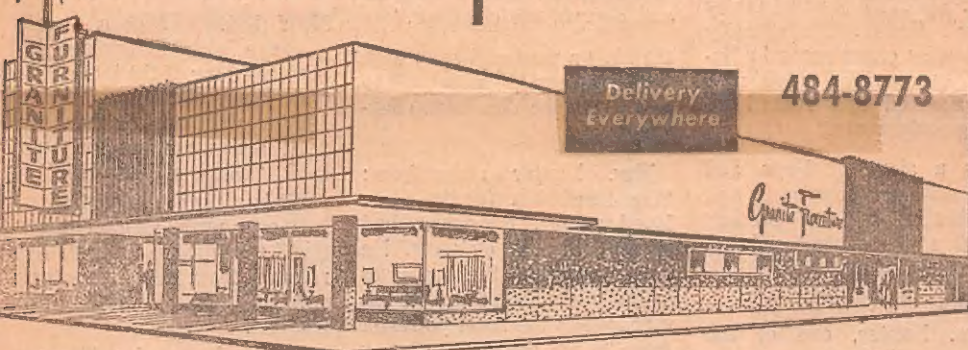
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